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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 002253

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT, MINDANAO REBELS PREPARE FOR MORE
INFORMAL TALKS

REF: A. MANILA 2217 (PHILIPPINE PEACE PANEL CHAIR
OUTLINES TALKS WITH MILF)
[1](#)B. MANILA 2198 (CHARGE DISCUSSES PEACE PROSPECTS
WITH MILF LEADER)

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: At an October 26 meeting, Department of Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Rafael Seguis reconfirmed the agenda for upcoming informal talks in Kuala Lumpur with a southern Philippines rebel group and asked the DCM for an outline of her October 16 visit to the rebels' headquarters near Cotabato City. Seguis said the Philippine government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) still planned to negotiate the content of a Civilian Protection Mechanism agreement as well as the list of countries that would comprise the International Contact Group at the October 27 meeting. He welcomed the DCM's October 16 meeting with the MILF as a sign of U.S. support for the peace process, and greatly appreciated the DCM's informing him about the visit beforehand (Ref A). The DCM briefly outlined her discussion with MILF Chairman Murad, noting that the U.S. reaffirmed the principles expressed in a 2003 letter from A/S Kelly to the MILF Chairman (Ref B). Both Malaysia and the Philippine government, Seguis said, were now seriously engaged on moving the peace process forward. He expressed a new confidence in Malaysia's role and described the Philippine government's efforts to lay a foundation for transitioning the peace talks to a new administration following the May 2010 elections.
END SUMMARY.

CIVILIAN PROTECTION TOPS AGENDA AT ONE-DAY TALKS

[1](#)2. (C) Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Rafael Seguis invited the DCM to his office October 26 to discuss the informal talks to be held this week in Kuala Lumpur with the southern Philippines insurgent group Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and to learn about the DCM's October 16 visit to MILF headquarters at Camp Darapanan. At a planned meeting October 27 in Kuala Lumpur, Seguis said the two sides hoped to exchange drafts of a Civilian Protection Mechanism (CPM) agreement to protect internally displaced persons (IDPs) and civilians in conflict zones (Ref A). While the Philippines was already a signatory to the Geneva Convention, the MILF -- as a non-state actor -- was not, and a protection agreement could help hold the MILF accountable for its attacks on civilian populations. Citing Philippine sovereignty, Seguis said the GRP disagreed with the MILF's proposal to invite foreign policing entities to Mindanao, including police forces from Islamic states such as Qatar, although international NGOs such as the International Committee for the Red Cross would be acceptable. At the meeting, Seguis said he would once again be polite and respectful to the MILF Peace Panel members, including "hardliner" Michael Mastura, because "honey attracts more flies than vinegar."

COMPOSITION OF THE CONTACT GROUP

13. (C) Seguis said the parties also planned to discuss their lists of recommended countries for the International Contact Group (ICG), though he expressed concern the MILF would seek to include countries that the GRP would oppose. The parties would not create terms of reference for the ICG, leaving it up to ICG members themselves to determine the scope of their contributions to the peace process. The DCM cautioned that terms of reference could help ICG members to have a clear understanding of what they would be expected to do. Seguis explained that the GRP's overriding concern was to leave the ICG role broad and unrestricted to avoid getting "stuck" in the MILF's myopic view of the group. The GRP would listen to the ICG, but would have to obey Philippine law regardless of what recommendations emanated from the ICG. Seguis noted that the MILF seemed to have forgotten that the ICG members would be state actors who are already bound by the UN Charter to principles of non-interference and territorial integrity.

SEGUIS WELCOMES U.S. MEETING WITH MILF

14. (C) Turning to the DCM's October 16 meeting with MILF leaders, Seguis emphasized that the Philippines welcomed the U.S. visit to the MILF's Camp Darapanan in support of the peace process, and greatly appreciated the DCM's informing him beforehand about the visit. Although he said he discouraged Ambassadors from meeting with the MILF, he proudly insisted there were no prohibitions in the

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Philippines on whom foreign diplomats could meet. "We already allow the peace process to be facilitated by another country," Seguis noted, in a reference to Malaysia, "so why not allow another country to see the MILF?" The Japanese and European Union missions, Seguis noted, visited Camp Darapanan, so there was no reason for the U.S. to be an exception. The DCM briefly described her October 16 discussion with MILF Chairman Murad, including the reiteration of principles outlined in the 2003 letter from A/S Kelly to the MILF, the MILF's emphasis on the U.S. historical role in Mindanao, and the MILF's ambiguous request for the U.S. to play a larger political role in the peace process (all previously reprinted by the MILF on their web page).

MALAYSIA PLAYS A MEANINGFUL ROLE

15. (C) Following a recent meeting with Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak, Seguis said he concluded that Malaysia has a strategic interest in a peaceful solution to the GRP-MILF conflict, despite hyperbolic news stories that asserted otherwise. Increased Philippine-Malaysian cooperation in ASEAN and the possibility of Mindanao violence driving refugees to Sabah all but ensured Malaysia's sincere interest in a negotiated settlement. Following the October 27 informal talks, Seguis noted, Malaysian facilitator Datu Othman was planning to arrange a luncheon for foreign mission Ambassadors in Kuala Lumpur interested in learning about the ICG.

PREPARING DOMESTIC CONSTITUENCIES

16. (C) Seguis noted that he and Annabelle Abaya, appointed by President Arroyo to be the new Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) October 24 (septel), were working on a strategy to handle the challenges of the upcoming election season. The government was preparing to brief Philippine presidential candidates on the peace process and would attempt to avoid triggering adverse Philippine Supreme Court decisions, like the August 2008 temporary restraining order

that derailed the signing of a territorial agreement with the MILF. Should a constitutional convention convene to amend the Philippine Constitution, the government would agree, if necessary for a peace agreement, to recommend changes to Congress, although could not guarantee their passage. The government would continue to adhere to a two-track approach to peace through negotiation and reconstruction.

COMMENT

17. (C) As the parties return to the "informal" negotiating table this week, observers will be looking for signs that the parties can build on the progress to date: the July ceasefire and the September agreement that endorsed the creation of the ICG. While there are likely to be disagreements, including the precise composition of the ICG and the role of foreign policing entities within the Civilian Protection Mechanism, the parties have thus far shown a willingness to talk through their differences.

KENNEY